

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NASA-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EA-06 SAJ-01 ACDA-05 /076 W

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R 061240Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO AMEMBASSY PARIS

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 6926

CINCLANT NORFOLK VA

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENG

COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 0242

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR MA FR (BIGEARD, MARCEL)

SUBJECT: NEW FRENCH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE GENERAL  
BIGEARD

1. GENERAL MARCEL BIGEARD IS UNDOUBTEDLY ALREADY WELL KNOWN TO EMBASSY PARIS, BUT, JUST IN CASE IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL, WE ARE SUMMARIZING OUR ASSESSMENT BASED ON ACQUAINTANCESHIP WITH HIM DURING HIS SERVICE AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF FRENCH INDIAN OCEAN FORCES (WHICH TERMINATED IN SUMMER 1973), WITH HEADQUARTERS IN TANANARIVE.

2. I PERSONALLY ENTERTAINED BIGEARD TWICE FOR DINNER, INCLUDING FAREWELL IN HIS HONOR, AND FOUND HIM STEADY AND CLOSE FRIEND OF U.S. VETERAN OF DIEN BIEN PHU, BIGEARD (IN CONTRAST TO FRENCH GOVERNMENT POLICY) EXPRESSED COMPLETE SUPPORT FOR U.S. VIET-NAM POLICY AND HOPES FOR OUR SUCCESS. THOUGH I DID NOT DISCUSS NATO WITH HIM, I WOULD ESTIMATE THAT HE WOULD PERSONALLY FAVOR REINTEGRATION OF FRENCH FORCES INTO NATO MILITARY STRUCTURE.

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3. VERY MUCH A MILITARY MAN, WITH PASSION FOR PHYSICAL

FITNESS (SHARED BY MME BIGEARD, WHO JOINED HIM IN SEVERAL-KILOMETER RUN AROUND TANANARIVE EACH MORNING), HE IS A STRAIGHT SHOOTER WHO TALKS FRANKLY, DIRECTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY. IN FACT, MY ONE CONCERN ABOUT HIM WAS THAT HIS FRANK COMMENTS TO PRESS MIGHT BRING FRENCH POLITICAL WRATH DOWN ON HIM. BUT I AM HAPPY TO SEE I WAS MISTAKEN IN VIEW OF HIS POLITICAL NOMINATION AS SECRETARY STATE FOR DEFENSE.

4. HIS COURAGE WAS DEMONSTRATED BY HIS DISAGREEMENT WITH FORMER FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO MADAGASCAR PLANTEY OVER FRENCH ROLE IN THIS COUNTRY. PLANTEY WANTED MAINTAIN FULL FRENCH DOMINANCE OVER MADAGASCAR, BUT BIGEARD, WELL AWARE OF DANGERS THIS POSED TO FUTURE FRENCH INFLUENCE HERE, FAVORED FRENCH GOVT INITIATIVE IN SCALING DOWN ITS NEO-COLONIALIST ROLE IN MILITARY AS WELL AS OTHER FIELDS. EVENTS OF COURSE PROVED BIGEARD, NOT PLANTEY, RIGHT.

5. BIGEARD WAS EXTREMELY POPULAR WITH MALAGASY. FINAL DEMONSTRATION OF THIS FACT WAS HEAVY ATTENDANCE BY RANKING MALAGASY OFFICERS AT HIS FAREWELL RECEPTION WHICH CAME AT VERY MOMENT WHEN FRENCH-MALAGASY RELATIONS WERE AT THEIR WORST FOLLOWING RENEGOTIATION OF COOPERATION ACCORDS WHICH, INTER ALIA, ENDED FRENCH MILITARY POSITION IN MADAGASCAR. WHILE MALAGASY WANTED FRANCE OUT OF MADAGASCAR MILITARILY, THEY CONTINUED HOLD BIGEARD IN HIGH ESTEEM. MENDENHALL

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**Subject:** NEW FRENCH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE GENERAL BIGEARD  
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